

House Rejects Congressman's Measure to Protect Medical Marijuana Patients in States That Allow Medicinal Use of the Drug

Washington, DC -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today vowed to continue fighting to end any federal raids and prosecution of patients and suppliers who use and sell medical marijuana in compliance with state law. The House last night defeated a bipartisan amendment that Hinchey, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), Congressman Sam Farr (D-CA), and Congressman Tom McClintock (R-CA) offered to the bill that funds the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) that would have prohibited the agency from spending any money in its budget to prevent states from implementing medical marijuana laws that have been approved by the legislature or voter referendum.

"The federal government needs to once and for all put an end to these senseless raids and prosecutions of medical marijuana patients, doctors, and suppliers who are in complete compliance with their own state's laws concerning the drug," Hinchey said. "It is incomprehensible that the DEA would think that it's a good use of its resources to arrest and prosecute an American who is using medical marijuana in accordance with state law to relieve their pain and suffering from AIDS, cancer, multiple sclerosis or glaucoma. I'm pleased to see so many of my colleagues vote in support of this amendment to protect states' rights, but obviously it was not enough. The fight goes on."

Over the last decade, 16 states and Washington, DC have adopted laws that allow for the use

of marijuana for medical purposes. Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington passed these laws to allow the use of marijuana to relieve pain and other complications that accompanies debilitating diseases such as AIDS, cancer, multiple sclerosis and glaucoma.

The federal government, however, has made it nearly impossible for these states to implement their medical marijuana laws. Despite an Executive Order from President Obama directing the Justice Department to not prioritize such cases, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has conducted numerous raids on medical marijuana dispensaries that are in full compliance with state law. Businesspeople and cooperatives who are licensed and certified within these states to function as legitimate medical marijuana dispensaries have seen their businesses locked down, assets frozen or business driven away by federal authorities.

The purpose of the amendment was to permit people suffering from horrific diseases to get relief, allowing their doctors to decide which drugs will work best to do so. Contrary to the claims of some critics, the amendment would not change marijuana's classification as a Schedule I narcotic under the Controlled Substance Act; would not require states to adopt medical marijuana laws; would not stop law enforcement officials from prosecuting marijuana-related activities that are not protected by state law; and it does not encourage the recreational use of marijuana by children or anyone. The amendment would have only affected states with laws allowing the use of medical marijuana by preventing the Justice Department from arresting, prosecuting, suing, or otherwise interfering with doctors, patients or dispensaries in those 16 states for following their state laws with regard to medical marijuana.

Medicinal benefits of marijuana are well documented. At the request of the White House, the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine conducted a study in 1999, which indicated that marijuana can relieve severe pain, nausea, and appetite loss.

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